



# Call to Order

The E-newsletter of the Senate Majority Caucus

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Majority Caucus Website: [www.capitol.hawaii.gov/senmaj/](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/senmaj/)

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## Senate, House Exchange Majority Package Bills



Senator Rosalyn Baker (D-5th, South Maui, West Maui) with Ruby Silva of Waianae and Stanley Sampson of Mililani, who will be among the estimated 300,000 Hawaii residents to benefit from Hawaii Rx Plus.

### Senate Bills "Cross Over" to House

Measures that are key components of the 2004 Joint House-Senate Majority Package have passed the Senate by decisive votes and are headed to the

House of Representatives. The bills address the challenges of public education, the ice epidemic, and rising prescription drug costs. They all passed by decisive margins.

### Ice Bills Advance

The Substance Abuse Omnibus Bill, SD 3233 SD1, passed the Senate by a 21-3 vote on March 1. The measure toughens criminal penalties, enhances early intervention and treatment programs, provides treatment alternatives for some first-time offenders, and provides parity in health insurance benefits for substance abuse.

### Cost of Prescription Drugs Expected to Drop

Hawaii Rx Plus builds on the existing Hawaii Rx program to provide prescription drug coverage to members of a growing "gap group" of people

who face high prescription drug costs and have neither the insurance nor the means to pay for them. Speaking in support of the bill he sponsored, Commerce, Consumer Protection and Housing Chair Ron Menor (D-17<sup>th</sup>, Mililani, Waipio), said, "the actions that the Legislature will take to establish Hawaii Rx Plus herald a major upgrade in health care benefits for a large segment of Hawaii's consumers." The measure passed by a 23-1 margin on March 2.

### Education Reform Passes

SB3238 SD2 is a comprehensive education reform and decentralization measure that creates incentives for teachers and principals, expands accountability, and provides for smaller class sizes and increased local control of public schools. The measure passed by a 22-3 margin.

## Hawaii Rx Plus Bill a Long Journey for Senator Menor

The passage of the Hawaii Rx Plus bill on March 2 was especially gratifying to Senator Ron Menor, who has been investigating the issue of prescription drug care for more than three years. Although medical science has made great strides in the quality and effectiveness of prescription drugs in recent years, the high cost of medications has become out of reach for many of the people who need them. The average retail prescription drug price has

doubled in the last 10 years. Especially hard-hit are elderly persons who live on fixed incomes. Sen. Menor worked with the AARP, attending numerous hearings and talking to stakeholders at every level. In September of 2003 he traveled to Maine, along with bill co-sponsor Rep. Roy Takumi (D-36<sup>th</sup>) and AARP State Director Greg Marchildon, to learn at first hand about the groundbreaking Maine Rx program, upon which the Hawaii program is modeled.



Senator Ron Menor is Chair of the Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Housing. The Hawaii Rx Plus measure is the outcome of years of study by Sen. Menor and his colleagues.

## MEDIA WATCH: Hooser Bill Wins Editorial Support

An initiative to change the way University of Hawaii regents are selected has won editorial support from the *Honolulu Advertiser*. ("Change in regent selection sensible," March 8). SB3125 SD2, which passed the Senate on March 9th by a vote of 20 to 4, was sponsored by Education Vice-Chair Sen. Gary Hooser (D-7<sup>th</sup>, Kauai, Niihau).

The bill calls for the establishment of a Candidate Advisory Council to assist the Governor "in determining criteria for, identifying, and recruiting" qualified candidates. The 12-member council would include four members appointed by the President of the Senate, four appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and four members appointed by the Governor. The Governor would then choose from among the recommended candidates, who would then go through a confirmation process by

the Legislature. The *Advertiser* editorial says, "For far too long the university and the regents have been seen as overly politicized. This has damaged the university in recruiting, in fund-raising and in many other ways.... The idea has received strong approval from national authorities on higher education. Similar systems are already in place in many states on the Mainland."

The measure has already won the support of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, which wrote to Sen. Hooser, "Your efforts are to be commended and supported. [The Association] has advocated this approach for nearly two decades." The Candidate Advisory Council will perform a similar function to that of the Judicial Selection Commission, which applies strict merit-based criteria to the nomination and retention of judges."



### MADD Leadership Honored For Public Education Effort

Members of the MADD Hawaii chapter were presented with a certificate of recognition in the Senate Chambers. They include David Taylor, president of MADD-Hawaii, Sharon Inamine, vice president, Leanna Stodd, founder and past president of the MADD-Maui County chapter, and Carol McNamee, founder and past president of MADD-Honolulu County. Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland (far left) Sen. Melodie Aduja (second from left), Sen. Willie Espero (second from right) and Sen. Donna Kim (far right) posed for a picture with members of MADD'S Hawaii chapter.

## Hawaii Guard Units Recognized on Senate Floor

The gallery in the Senate Chambers was crowded March 3 as Sen. Cal Kawamoto stood to speak, but it was not lobbyists or students who filled the wooden benches at the State Capitol, it was members of the Hawaii Army National Guard.

The Senate recognized these soldiers for their willingness to fulfill their mission, which at this time involves leaving the Islands to join in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"These soldiers stand ready to fulfill their honorable mission of providing for the safety, welfare, and defense of our state and nation," said Sen. Kawamoto.

Members of Charlie Company, 193<sup>rd</sup> Aviation and members of Bravo Company, 193<sup>rd</sup> Aviation of the Hawaii Army National Guard will be going to



Sen. Donna Kim and Sen. Cal Kawamoto  
with Army National Guard members

Iraq and Afghanistan respectively.

Sen. Kawamoto said the 200 members of Charlie Company have been preparing for this mission at Schofield Barracks since January 2004.

Since September 11, 2001, more than

1,200 National Guard members have been activated and more than 400 have been sent to the Middle East and Afghanistan.

The Hawaii Army National Guard and Air National Guard have a total of 5,500 soldiers. Charlie Company is the Hawaii Army National Guard's heavy helicopter unit, and Bravo Company is responsible for the maintenance of the helicopters flown by both the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as well as the Hawaii Army National Guard.

Their deployment is supposed to last one year, starting March 22 when they leave for Iraq.

"We extend our best wishes to them for a safe return home and continued success in all future endeavors," said Sen. Kawamoto.